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# In NORTH KOREA

*First Eye-Witness Report*

ANNA LOUISE STRONG

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**FIRST EYE-WITNESS REPORT**

By ANNA LOUISE STRONG

Published by  
**SOVIET RUSSIA TODAY**  
New York, 1949

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### **The Author**

*Anna Louise Strong, writer, lecturer and world traveller, was the first correspondent to report from North Korea and the only American correspondent to travel extensively through that country interviewing people in all walks of life. This booklet is based on her observations there. Miss Strong has achieved international eminence as a correspondent for her reports from the major capitals of the world and her coverage of some of the most historic events of our times. Among her many books are The Soviets Expected It, Peoples of the USSR, and I Saw the New Poland. Her latest, just published, is Tomorrow's China.*

### **Foreword**

THERE is a striking difference today in the two zones in Korea, which is noticed by all peoples of the Far East.

In the north, in the Soviet zone, the Soviet Army is withdrawing in the midst of tremendous popular demonstrations of the Korean people honoring troops which liberated them from Japan. Three hundred thousand Koreans turned out in Pyongyang, capital city, and hundreds of thousands in other cities, to bid farewell and thank the Soviet troops.

Meanwhile, in the south, American troops clearly intend to remain at the request of the local "government" which the Americans set up, but the Korean people show their displeasure by strikes and uprisings, including revolts of armed forces which are ruthlessly put down with the help of American troops.

Few facts about Korea are allowed to reach the American people. Information from South Korea is heavily censored by General MacArthur's Tokyo headquarters, while facts from North Korea never appear at all. This pamphlet is an attempt to bring such facts.

The most important present fact is that today two governments exist in Korea. The only government Americans are allowed to hear about is that of Syngman Rhee in Seoul. Rhee is an aged reactionary who spent his entire life outside of Korea, chiefly in America, and was brought back by American military plane. His government was confirmed last May by the "election" which most Korean political parties boycotted, leaving only Rhee's ticket, while voters were dragooned by the police and forced to attend the polls under threat of losing their land and ration cards. This election was held only in the American zone in South Korea because its forms and methods—devised by America—were refused



in the north. All observers state that police terror was widely used.

[The United Nations General Assembly in Paris passed a resolution, strongly opposed by the Soviet Union, recommending the recognition of the Rhee Government, and giving the United States discretionary powers as to how long its troops should remain in South Korea.—Ed.]

In contrast was another election of which Americans heard little. It was held last August 25 in all parts of Korea. Preparations were made by two conferences, representing scores of political parties and public organizations from both north and south zones of the country—all parties dedicated to unity of the Korean nation.

In the northern zone the election took place peacefully and with tremendous enthusiasm. Many people went to the polls in the middle of the night in order to be first to greet the dawn of a new day at elections whose results should unify Korea, free for the first time in forty years. Over 99 per cent of the electorate turned out. In many places voting finished long before noon.

In the southern zone, Americans declared these elections illegal, but nonetheless they were held under harsh conditions of police terror. Unable to hold them openly, they were held partly by house to house canvas, partly by meetings in villages, and partly by underground meetings of trade unions and other public organizations. According to a statement made by Syngman Rhee himself to correspondents on September 2, many thousands of people were arrested for participating in these "illegal" elections. Because of police terror, these elections in South Korea were held in two stages. First, 1,080 delegates were elected by popular vote by various methods; then these delegates held a special congress in the city of Kaishu to select 360 deputies to represent South Korea in a joint Assembly of the entire country. That there were desperate efforts by the American military to stop this election is shown by the fact that of 1,080 elected delegates, seventy-eight were unable to reach Kaishu because forty-two were jailed and quite a number killed.

Despite all repressions, Koreans estimate that 77.5 per cent of the electorate of South Korea took part in choosing these deputies.

The "Supreme National Assembly" met September 2 in Pyongyang, consisting of 572 deputies, of which 360 were from South Korea and 212 from North Korea, thus representing in proper proportion the population of the entire country. In contrast to Syngman Rhee's Assembly which contains a handpicked group of landlords, capitalists and former Japanese puppets, the "Supreme National Assembly" meeting in Pyongyang contained a normal cross section of the population: 194 peasants, 120 workers, 152 white collar workers, 29 employers, etc.

This "Supreme National Assembly" adopted a Constitution for the entire country, elected a presidium for continuous administrative work and requested both America and the Soviet Union to withdraw their troops. The Soviet Union complied and began withdrawal, to be completed by January 1, 1949; and also exchanged ambassadors with the new Korean government. America, however, evidently intends to keep troops in Korea indefinitely to support Syngman Rhee who asks them to remain, since he could not otherwise keep power.

This is the reason why the Soviet Army, withdrawing, wins plaudits of the great masses of Korean people while the United States Army, remaining, finds opposition, unrest, constant strikes and uprisings against its armed control.

It is time the American people learned how their military representatives and the policies of their State Department are discrediting America in Asia. Manchuria and North China were the first lesson; Korea will be a second lesson, proving to all Asiatic peoples that American armed forces intervene to support reactionary rulers against the will of the people. The peoples of Asia also are learning another lesson—that American armed support cannot succeed in maintaining these puppet rulers against an outraged people's will.

Anna Louise Strong  
November, 1948



# IN NORTH KOREA

## 1. *From many witnesses*

"Korea is a major responsibility which we [Americans] as a world power have voluntarily assumed. . . . We have committed here some of our most excruciating errors. . . . Opinion polls show that 64 out of every 100 Koreans dislike us." Mark Gayn in *New York Star*, November, 1947.

The American zone of South Korea was called a "police state" by Roger Baldwin, chief of the American Civil Liberties Union, who visited Korea by special invitation of General Douglas MacArthur, and—after this one indignant outburst—kept silent about the place.

"The United States now has a puppet state in South Korea. Elections held under a 'protecting umbrella' of U. S. troops have put a discredited rightist, Dr. Syngman Rhee, in power. . . . This probably marks the birth of a new civil war in which American forces are likely to be heavily involved." Israel Epstein in *Gazette and Daily*, York, Pa., June 8, 1948.

"It gives most Americans a start to realize that we are rapidly losing the cold war in Korea. . . . Many of the facts have been obscured by congenital American optimism. . . . Others have been suppressed by censorship and bad news reporting." Maxwell S. Stewart in *The Nation*, May 22, 1948.

IN DAYS TO COME, Korea will continue to supply headlines. Yet there is little public knowledge about the country and most of the headlines distort rather than reveal the facts.

On the basis of accounts by the above writers, I condense the following background:

Korea is a country of 85,000 square miles and close to 30,000,-

000 people. It is mostly a land of farmers. What large industries the Japanese built in twenty-five years of control and exploitation are largely in the north.

In February, 1945, when the USSR agreed at Yalta to join the Allies in the war on Japan, it was decided to divide Korea into two zones for purposes of military action. The Russians took the north, the Americans the south. The following July, at Potsdam, the 38th parallel was chosen as the "great divide."

Korea was a victim of Japanese aggression, not an enemy. We would come as liberators, not as conquerors. The military occupation was to end within a year of victory, followed by about five years of civilian trusteeship in which all the Big Four Powers, America, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and China, should help Korea to her feet.

That was the plan. The reality proved otherwise. The growing cold war against the Soviet Union made Korea also a base. The two zones solidified into two areas of military occupation. Friction continues to grow.

When American troops landed in South Korea, September 7, 1945, thousands of Koreans danced and cheered and shouted: "Mansai," or "Live a Thousand Years." Within six months surly Koreans were demanding how soon the Americans would go home. Within a year great uprisings took place in eighty cities and in hundreds of farming villages against the "police state" that the American armed forces kept in power.

When the Americans landed in Korea, the Koreans had already a *de facto* government. A "People's Republic" had been declared a day earlier by a congress of Koreans themselves. General John R. Hodge, commander of the U. S. armed forces, dissolved this "People's Republic," and drove most of its members underground. Two days after landing, Hodge announced to the Koreans—who had waited a quarter of a century for liberation—that Japanese officials would temporarily continue to run Korea. Korean delegations waiting to greet Americans were fired on—by Japanese police!

The Russians pursued an opposite policy. They recognized the "People's Committees" that the Americans were suppressing. They encouraged Korean initiative when it took the form of ousting the Japanese-appointed puppets, dividing the landlords' lands, and



nationalizing the Japanese-owned industry as the "property of the Korean people." They especially looked with favor on what they called "mass organizations,"—farmers' unions, labor unions, women's associations and unions of youth. The Russian zone in the north fairly blossomed with such organizations energetically building their country after their own desire.

From time to time the Americans and Russians held conferences to determine Korea's future. Nothing came of these talks but increasing bitterness for two years. The Americans insisted on including pro-Japanese quislings and returned exiles in the provisional government. The Russians refused. The Russians insisted on including representatives of the trade unions, the farmers' union and other similar organizations. The USA would not hear of this.

The talks finally failed both locally in Korea, and directly between Secretary of State George C. Marshall and Soviet Foreign Minister V. M. Molotov. Then the USSR proposed that both Soviet and American troops leave Korea, permitting the Koreans to run their own show. The United States refused, fearing that the ideas and methods of North Korea would prevail. It used its United Nations majority to form an international commission to observe elections in Korea. The Russians boycotted this commission and the elections took place in the American zone alone.

The United Nations Commission was of two minds about holding this election. All the members opposed the establishment of a "national government" in South Korea, lest it "harden and perpetuate the existing division." The Commission insisted that fundamental reforms were needed in South Korea before an honest election could be held. It produced a mass of evidence on the denial of civil rights in that area. The report was delivered to the "Little Assembly," a part of the United Nations whose exact legal status has never been clear, and whose power to act on the matter was questionable. However, on the insistence of the United States, the "Little Assembly" acted, and ordered that Korean elections be held unilaterally in the American zone.

The Americans had underestimated the Korean passion for unity and independence. Much to American surprise, two out of three of South Korea's outstanding conservative leaders—the very men whom Americans had picked to run the zone—denounced

the elections as a device for partitioning the country. Kimm Kiu-sic, chairman of the South Korean Interim Legislative Assembly—a post for which he had been handpicked by the Americans—resigned his position in protest, and accepted an invitation from the Koreans of the Soviet zone to come and confer. Kim Koo, leader of the right-wing terrorists, also boycotted the elections, and went to the northern conference instead. So did the representatives of fifty-seven different political parties and social organizations of South Korea.

The elections were held in South Korea in May, 1948 in the midst of police terrorism and political murders, and revolts and uprisings on the left. Right-wing terrorists destroyed newspaper offices and even attacked the YMCA. Instead of suppressing the "Youth Corps" for its acts of lawlessness the American military authorities used 25,000 of its members, armed with lead-tipped clubs, to supervise the election.

Meanwhile a "National Unity Conference" was held at Pyongyang, in North Korea, on April 22, 1948. It was attended not only by delegates from North Korea, but by 240 delegates from fifty-seven organizations of South Korea. This "Unity Conference" declared itself irrevocably opposed to the holding of separate elections in South Korea and the setting up of a separate government there. It declared that Korea could be unified by the Korean people on the following basis:

- 1) Withdrawal of the two occupation armies.
- 2) Organization of a provisional government by a national political conference.
- 3) Adoption of a national constitution and formation of a united national government by representatives elected through a national election.

The two right wing leaders from the south who attended this unity conference—Kim Koo and Kimm Kiu-sic, had no difficulty in getting the reassurance they wanted from the North Koreans that private capitalism would be permitted. They agreed on a plank which rejected "private monopolies" but recognized private "property rights." They agreed also to permit no dictatorship but establish a "democratic government."

It is on this basis that the "Supreme National Assembly" elected on August 25th by the Korean people, has started to function in



the North, while Syngman Rhee holds power in the American zone.

So much for the general situation in Korea, attested by many witnesses.

## 2. *In the Soviet zone*

KOREA, which is occupied by the American Army in the south and the Soviet Army in the north, is the center of acrimonious controversy on a basis of very few known facts. The few correspondents who have visited South Korea have had glimpses of great strikes and farmers' uprisings ruthlessly suppressed under an American Military Government. No correspondent until my visit, had travelled through the Soviet zone of North Korea at all.

The whole of Korea is thus what is called "iron-curtained" country. But who, one wonders put the curtain up? After I applied for a visa to North Korea and got it, I learned that the big American agencies did not want the news. They told me flatly that they preferred to get the tales of the Soviet zone from the refugees who ran away from it, which is about like getting one's facts about London from Berlin during the war. They assured me that I myself would get no real facts in the Soviet zone, but would be watched and handicapped at every turn.

It is therefore necessary to state first how I got my facts in North Korea. When I reached the airport in Pyongyang, the capital, a courteous Russian major of the army's press department offered me his services in getting about. He arranged a room for me in a hotel with western style beds and food and was useful for first routine contacts. Then I told him that too much guidance would invalidate my observations, and that I wanted to go around alone among Koreans. He got the point; thereafter I made my own plans.

I travelled from coast to coast across the country, visiting vil-

lages, industrial plants, rest homes of the social insurance system. I picked up interpreters where I found them; some had learned English in American missionary schools. I talked freely to farmers, workers, factory managers, women, writers, officials. I got my facts entirely from Koreans, all of whom seemed glad to talk and unconstrained. If and when I met Russians they usually declined to comment on Korean affairs, saying: "It is the Koreans' country; ask them." I had freer and closer contact with Korean people in the Russian zone than any correspondent has reported from the American zone.

My strongest impression was that the Koreans seemed to think that they were running things. They were even naive about it. Again and again I was told that the "democratic government," the universal suffrage, the land reform, the expanding agriculture, industry and education was the work, as one farmer put it, "of our own hands." The Russians, they insisted, were just there because of a treaty with the Americans, and only to give advice.

"The Russians liberated us from the Japanese," said one, "but we Koreans did all the rest."

If I remarked that the Russians still handled their foreign contacts and supplied their defense—for North Korea had, in autumn of 1947, no army of its own\*—they would brush this aside as if foreign relations and army didn't matter. "In all the running of the country," they would say, "in elections, in police, in courts, in acts of government, we Koreans are the boss."

The only concentration of Russians was in the capital, Pyongyang, and they were not very conspicuous even there. The only time I saw Russians much in evidence was at the anniversary celebration of the date of liberation, August 15, 1947. Russian generals stood beside the President Kim Il Sung in the tribune in Pyongyang to review the floats of factories and organizations and receive the plaudits of the marching crowd. In the banquet that followed, Russians and Koreans mingled on equal terms, drank alternate toasts, sang in turn the folk songs of their people—I was struck by the fact that the Russians responded with old Ukrainian love songs rather than with Bolshevik propaganda — and

\* Since my visit the North Koreans have organized their own army, stating that this was necessary because of the large force of "right reactionary terrorists," armed by Americans in South Korea. The Americans were justifying their action by claiming that the North Koreans had an army of 250,000, but there was no army at all in the north at the time—late 1947.



danced with each other's womenfolk. It was a natural, joyous celebration of a joint victory. But it was hard for me to imagine an American occupying army mingling in such easy equality with an Asiatic race. That is one of Russia's strong points in Asia.

#### RUSSIANS AND KOREANS

As far as I could see, the Russians were popular. What was more important, their popularity had grown. There had been some complaint against them at first, in 1945, for the first troops that came in fighting were tough babies from the German front; liberating armies, even when they are of one's own people are not easy for a civilian population to take. But these shock troops were quickly replaced by small numbers of selected experts in farming, industry, engineering and government, who were dotted around the country, and whose functions were quite clearly circumscribed.

A Korean farm inspector on the east coast told me that there were only ten or twelve Russians in his provincial capital and three or four in his county seat, and that their job was "just to give advice."

"For instance I got the job of farm inspector because I know farming. But I don't know inspecting for no Korean had such jobs before. So I go and ask one of the Russians how to make out reports for the government. They have specialists in all lines. They are good-hearted, simple people who have more experience of government than we."

This almost amusingly naive attitude towards the Russian occupation is partly the brag of a newly liberated people but it must also be credited to the shrewd technique of the Russians. Unlike the Americans in the south, who were always discussing which candidate to support and who, as their own chosen chairman of the Legislature, Kimm Kiu-sek, himself stated, "were always interfering in every little thing," the Russians never appointed or even discussed a single governing official in North Korea nor have they ever discussed the merits of any proposed Korean laws. They took very firmly the position that these things were the Koreans' own affair. The Russians have their own technique of influence—we shall see as we proceed further—but it is always in terms of influence, not of domination. I could not find

a Korean who felt that the Russians were "over him" in any sense at all.

I found in fact an almost mystical belief in the "power of the Korean people." One farmer actually told me that the landlords submitted without resistance to the confiscation of their lands, not because of the Red Army but because "it was a just law and the will of the Korean people." A factory worker told me that the "pro-Japanese traitors ran away to the south," not because of the Russians but because "they feared the wrath of the people." The North Koreans seem hopeful adolescents in politics who still have to learn some international facts of life. But their attitude showed an awakened sense of their own political power.

This North Korean atmosphere is not due to Russian control of the news reaching the Koreans. Every village has plenty of radios that can listen to American army broadcasts from Tokyo. They are ex-Japanese radios especially geared to Tokyo propaganda; they can't get Moscow programs at all. There are also twenty-four newspapers of three political parties, including one privately owned paper run merely for profit. There is—if one can believe the unanimous assurance given me by reporters, writers and editors at a banquet they threw in my honor—no censorship in North Korea at all!

"It is not needed in the north, for everyone here is progressive and patriotic," was the incredible claim they made!

The idyllic, and rather unrealistic self-assurance that one finds among the North Koreans is due, in my judgment, to the ease with which farmers got land and workers got jobs and the people got the Japanese industries, houses and summer villas without any class struggle. And this in turn is due to the events of the last month of the war.

When the Red Army entered Korea in early August, 1945, heavy battles took place in the north, but the Japanese rule remained tranquil in the south, for the Russians stopped by the Yalta agreement at the 38th parallel, while the Americans came several weeks after the surrender of Japan, and ruled at first through the Japanese and then through the Japanese-appointed Korean officials and police. So naturally all of the pro-Japanese Koreans—former police and officials, landlords and stockholders in Japanese companies—fled south to the American zone.



The flight of all these right-wing elements amazingly simplified North Korean politics. The Russians did not have to set up any left-wing government, assuming that they wanted one. They merely set free some ten thousand political prisoners and said, by implication: "Go home, boys, you're free to organize."

Under Japanese rule all natural political leaders either served Japan or went to jail. With the pro-Japanese gone, the ex-jailbirds became the vindicated heroes of their home towns. They were all radicals of sorts, including many Communists. Anyone who knows what a tremendous reception was given to Tom Mooney when he was released to come home to the workers of San Francisco, may imagine the effect on the small towns and villages when ten thousand of these political martyrs came home. North Korea just naturally took a great swing leftwards, and the Russians had only to recognize "the choice of the Korean people."

People's Committees sprang up in villages, counties, and provinces and coalesced into a provisional government under the almost legendary guerrilla leader Kim Il Sung. Farmers organized, demanded the land from the landlords and got it in twenty-one days by a government decree. (Compared to the land reforms of other countries, this sounds like a tale of Aladdin's lamp!) Ninety per cent of all big industry—it had belonged to Japanese concerns—was handed over by the Russians "to the Korean people" and nationalized by one more decree. Trade unions organized, demanded a modern labor code, and got it without any trouble from their new government, with the eight-hour day, abolition of child labor, and social insurance all complete. Another decree made women equal with men in all spheres of activity and another expanded schools. Then general elections were held and a "democratic front" of three parties swept unopposed to power. The natural opposition had all gone south, to be sheltered—and put in power—by the Americans.

This is the reason, I think, for the almost exaggerated sense of "people's power" that the North Koreans express. Their real class struggle is coming; it hasn't fully hit them yet. The reactionaries all fled south, where they are bloodily suppressing strikes. In North Korea the farmers are building new houses and buying radios because they no longer pay land rent, while the workers are taking vacations in former Japanese villas.

The North Koreans assume that this is just what naturally happens when once you are a "liberated land." "They aren't yet liberated down south," they told me. "The Americans let those pro-Japanese traitors stay in power."

The American Military Government of South Korea will consider this charge fantastic. They have been hunting for rulers who were not compromised by association with the Japanese. But the Americans are thinking of a few figureheads at the top, whom they call the government. The Koreans think of the whole civil service and police apparatus that served Japan and that remained to serve America with the same brutal technique.

All this apparatus was thrown out in the north by what they call the "people's rule." And since it was thrown out, all North Koreans that I met insisted that they were "free."

### 3. *Government and elections*

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, there is no Communist Party in North Korea! It was rather a shock to me to discover this, for the American press cannot refer to this area without labeling it all as "Communist." That press is strictly out of date. Two years ago there was a Communist Party, a thriving one. It combined with the equally thriving "Farmers' Party" (People's Party) into the "North Korean Labor Party," which, as far as I could judge, seems more like America's last century "Populists" than like today's Russian Communists.

North Korea has had a vivid political history since the Japanese war. While the American press ignorantly dismissed it all as "totalitarian," or "Russian puppet," the Koreans have been energetically forming and reforming political parties, civic organizations, and holding elections of various kinds.

The clearest account of what occurred was given me by Lee Kang Kuk, head of foreign affairs. I checked it from other



sources, but Lee put it most succinctly. He has a trained legal mind. He was born in Seoul in the Korean royal family, of that Lee dynasty that Japan overthrew in 1910. ("Some spell it 'Lee,' some 'Yee,' some 'Rhee,'" he told me, "for the Korean letter resembles all of these.") He graduated at Seoul University in 1930, studied law in Europe, came home to practice and was jailed by the Japanese. After the surrender of Japan, Lee lived for a year in the American zone of South Korea, which had always been his home. Then he fled north because the Americans were going to jail him again.

Lee is thus a European-trained lawyer, familiar with the politics of both zones and able to explain them in terms of the Western world. He himself belonged to the "Farmers' Party," or "People's Party," under leadership of the veteran patriot Lyuh Woon Heung.

"After the surrender of Japan," Lee stated, "we organized People's Committees and set up local provisional governments all over Korea. We made no division between north and south for the Americans had not yet come and we did not know that they would suppress us. On September 6, 1945, three weeks after the surrender of Japan, we held our first congress in Seoul, of about one thousand representatives from all parts of the country. They had been chosen quickly and without full formality, but they were a fair representation of all the political tendencies in Korea, except the pro-Japanese. We took the name 'Korean People's Republic' and set up a 'People's Committee' of seventy-five members to hold provisional power and prepare for general elections. We even chose the very reactionary Syngman Rhee as chairman, because we knew that he would be the American candidate and we wanted unity with all our allies. Rhee came to Korea then in an American plane, waited around to see what the Americans wanted and then decided to repudiate our 'People's Committee' and rule as dictator with American aid. Since then, of course, we have no use for him.

"The American armed forces landed two days after we had declared our 'Korean People's Republic.' We sent delegations to greet them. They refused to deal with us, choosing rather to recognize the Japanese rule. The Americans disregarded and finally suppressed our People's Committees all over their zone.

The Russians recognized these committees as our local provisional governments. Thus began the great split between north and south.

"The split was not immediate. Not only the first provisional government but the first political parties and civic organizations—trade unions, the Farmer's Union, the Union of Youth, the Women's Union—formed first on a nationwide base. These organizations became in the north the centers of political life and the base of government; in the south they were attacked by right-wing terrorists, assisted by the Japanese-appointed (and now American-recognized) police.

"Thus all of these organizations and political parties were finally forced to divide into northern and southern organizations," Lee concluded, "since they are suppressed in the south while in the north they flourish as centers of political life.

"Today there are some 20,000 political prisoners in the American zone," Lee added, "twice as many as under Japan. I myself had to flee north to escape. It is well that I did, for our beloved leader Lyuh, head of the Farmers' Party, who remained in the south and cooperated with the American-installed government, was assassinated by right-wing terrorists a month ago" (in June, 1947).

#### THE POLITICAL PARTIES

There were no organized political parties of any kind when those first "People's Committees" were formed. There were men of many political views, but all political organization had been suppressed under the Japanese, so political parties had still to take organized legal form. These parties also began on a nationwide base. The "Democratic Party," small in number but containing many prominent intellectuals and businessmen, was quickly formed. It was followed at once by the Communists. For a time the largest party was the Farmers' Party (People's Party) but its organization was neither disciplined nor clearly defined. Finally in North Korea it merged with the Communists to form the North Korean Labor Party, which is by far the largest party now.

The second largest party, the Chendoguo, is based on a religious sect peculiar to Korea. It is a humanist religion, that de-



veloped in Korea before its subjugation by Japan, and continued under Japanese persecution. It has a wide following among farmers. It proclaims that I am God and you are God, and we should behave as such. The Chendoguo is a democratic religion, since Koreans are as much God as Japanese are. It was the Chendoguo that led the famous and naive pacifist revolt in 1919 when hundreds of thousands of Koreans rushed through the streets in white robes, proclaiming Korean independence and telephoning to the Japanese police that Korea was independent now. They were shot down by guns. The Chendoguo has thus its heroic tradition of martyrs; most of the political prisoners under Japan were either Chendoguo or Communist.

The Democratic Party of North Korea is small in size but influential, composed largely of business and professional men. The chief of the health department and the vice-president whom I interviewed were of this party.

The first acting government in North Korea as a whole was known as the "Provisional People's Committee of North Korea." It was formed by delegates from the six northern provinces to handle their joint problems, on February 8, 1946, when it had become clear that a government for all Korea was impossible at the time. It was composed of leading citizens of many political views but was non-partisan in nature, since the political parties were not yet fully organized.

This government faced many bitter problems.

The problem of food! North Korea was a land of mines and heavy industry, that had not fed itself for decades. It was deprived of food by its separation from South Korea.

The problem of industry! All Korean industry had been tied to the Japanese war industry, and had also been thoroughly wrecked by the Japanese before their surrender.

The problem of education! There must be schools in the Korean language, which had been discouraged under the Japanese.

Under the dynamic leadership of Kim Il Sung, who had fought the Japanese for fourteen years in the mountains north of Korea, the People's Committee accomplished a whirlwind program in a year. The land reform in March, 1946, transferred more than half of the lands of North Korea to new ownership.

The big industries were received from the Russians and nationalized "for the Korean people." A modern labor law was adopted; women's equality was proclaimed and schools were promoted. A furiously active political life went on.

#### THE FIRST GENERAL ELECTIONS

In November, 1946, North Korea held its first general elections, to approve or disapprove of what the provisional government had done. By this time there were three political parties: the North Korean Labor Party, which was by far the largest; the Chendoguo and the Democrats. These parties formed a "democratic front" and put up a joint ticket, the "single-slate ticket" so criticized in the west.

I argued with the Koreans about it but they seemed to like their system. Ninety-nine per cent of them came out to vote, and everyone with whom I talked declared that there was no compulsion but they came because they wanted to.

I discussed the question with a woman miner.

"Did you vote in the general elections?" I asked.

"Of course," she said. "The candidate was from our mine and a very good worker. Our mine put him up as candidate."

I explained the Western form of elections. What was the use of voting, I argued, if there was only one candidate. Her vote could change nothing.

It would be a great shame for the candidate, she replied, if the people did not turn out in large numbers to vote for him. He would even fail of election unless at least half of the people turned out. "Of course I knew that our candidate would be elected without me," she added with a self-deprecating smile, "for he is very popular and has plenty of votes without mine. But I wanted him to have more votes and to know that everybody is for him, for he is a very good worker from our mine. Besides, it was our first election, and nobody would stay away!"

"We all knew the candidate. We all liked him, we all discussed him," she concluded. "The political parties held meetings in our mines and factories and found the people's choices. Then they got together and combined on the best one, and the people went out and chose him. I don't see what's wrong with this or why the Americans don't like it." She paused and then added,



with a touch of defiance. "I don't see what the Americans have to say about it, anyway!"

Voting technique was simple. There was a black box for "no" and a white box for "yes." The voter was given a card, stamped with the electoral district; he went behind a screen and threw it into whichever box he chose. The cards were alike; nobody knew how he voted.

Were any candidates black-balled? I learned that there were thirteen cases in the township elections in which candidates were turned down by being thrown into the black box. This fact, which westerners may approve as showing "freedom of voting," was regarded with shame by the Koreans since it meant that "the local parties had poorly judged the people's choice." In one case a candidate was elected but received eight hundred adverse votes, organized by a political opponent. He at once offered to resign, as he had "failed to receive the full confidence of the voters"; the three political parties all jointly urged him to accept the post.

The Koreans are familiar with the competitive form of voting also. This was used in village elections and in many of the township elections in March, 1947. These elections were largely non-partisan, nominations being made not by parties but in village meetings. Secret voting followed, choosing the village government from competing candidates.

#### VOTING IN THE VILLAGE

The black and white boxes were also used in the village competitive elections, in a highly interesting manner. In one village there were twelve candidates, of whom five were to be chosen for the Village Committee. Each voter was given twelve cards, bearing the names of the candidates. He then cast his chosen ones into the white box and the rejected ones into the black.

"What prevents him from casting them all into the white box?" I asked.

"Nothing at all, but in that case he is voting against himself, for his votes do not advance any candidate beyond the others. He can do exactly as he likes. He can put as many as he likes in the white box, as many as he rejects in the black box, and if he wants to, he can take some of the cards home with him,

without either voting for them or against. If he has a single very strong choice, he will vote for one and against eleven; this strengthens his single vote, by giving black to all the rest. He can vote for three or four or six or seven, instead of five. The laws of mathematics insure that he weakens the strength of each vote if he votes for more than five. When all the ballots are counted, and the white checked against the black, we get the exact preference of the villagers."

Men who could not read and write also voted by this system. A man who could read would take all twelve cards at once. But if a voter felt that twelve cards would confuse him, he could take them one or more at a time, go to the boxes and cast them and come back for the rest.

I was intrigued by these village elections, which seemed to me exact and subtle in expressing the voters' choice. The Koreans with whom I talked, however, considered them rather primitive. To them the single slate, put up by agreement between the parties, and then ratified or rejected by the people, was a "more developed form." They argued that it was more likely to secure the best representatives in government, since the candidates were first widely discussed in public meetings and then examined by the leaders of all the parties before being finally proposed.

The election day became a tremendous festival. Priests held religious services and led congregations to vote. Farmers washed their hands ceremoniously and put on clean linen "to make government with clean hands." People who were sick in bed had the boxes taken to them, and their attendants were instructed to "turn their backs while the citizen voted." One case of a dying man was recorded who refused to die till he could get his vote cast! They brought him the boxes; he used his last energy to cast his ballot, then fell back and succumbed.

#### SOME LEADING PERSONALITIES

The devotion and zeal shown by the North Koreans in their first election went far beyond that known in older democratic lands. No North Korean with whom I talked doubted that he was living in a liberated country that was ruled by the "people's power."

Kim Il Sung, president of North Korea, is thirty-six years old,



less than half the age of Syngman Rhee, who holds power in the south. He is likely to outlast all the southern contenders for power, being not only much younger but much more of a fighter than they. Kim spent all his adult years from the age of nineteen fighting the Japanese. He built a guerrilla army of 10,000 men, which defended a hill government of more than 300,000 Koreans, holding the Japanese at bay for years.

I talked to President Kim in his bright spacious office in Pyongyang. He has a quick flashing smile under a mop of bushy, black hair. He wore the thin white coat that is the usual Korean summer garment. For more than an hour he told the story of his life.

President Kim came from a patriotic revolutionary family. His father was jailed in the uprising of 1919, when young Kim was seven years old. After the father's release the family moved to Manchuria, as many Korean patriots did, to escape Japan's control. Young Kim went to school in Manchuria, and got into trouble for organizing Korean students against the increasing power of Japan.

When Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, Kim's father was dead and the lad was nineteen years old. His mother buckled on him the two pistols of his father, and young Kim went to the hills to organize a "Korean Patriots' Band." He began with eighty men, but he captured Japanese arms and increased his followers until he had ten thousand. He made contact with the Chinese "Manchurian Volunteers" in their war against Japan, and he organized an "autonomous Korean government" of five counties in the Manchurian hills on the Korean border. He raided across the border into Korea, destroying Japanese garrisons. Then he sent agitators into Korean cities and organized the "Union for Liberation of the Motherland." They had a ten-point program, including national independence, political democracy, land reform and the eight-hour day. At the age of twenty-three, young Kim was president of this "Union" and commander of its armed forces, based on the northern hills. All of this was ten to fifteen years ago, when America and Chiang Kai-shek still recognized Japan as the lawful overlord in Manchukuo.

The Japanese wrote in their press of "that anti-emperor bandit

Kim Il Sung." They spread legends about him: that he could fly, that he could contract the earth and step from one place to a distant one. They put a price of 200,000 Yen on his head; it was \$100,000 in those days. An assassin killed a Korean and turned in a head, claiming that it was the head of Kim Il Sung. The Japanese press announced him dead. A year later they admitted that he was still very much alive.

Kim did not appear publicly in Korea in the first weeks after Japan's surrender. Many of his band returned, and the people were asking: "Where is he?" It was then discovered that Kim had been travelling about under an assumed name, taking part in the organization of local governments, in order to get acquainted with his native land, from which he had been an enforced exile so many years. A tremendous ovation greeted his first public appearance in Pyongyang and he was unanimously chosen first provisional president at the first assembly of delegates from the northern provinces. He was a member of the Communist Party and is now a member of its successor, the North Korean Labor Party, which is the largest party in North Korea.

"The government of North Korea is ready to take part in setting up a joint democratic government for a united Korea," Kim Il Sung told me. "The people of South Korea also desire this, but a wave of terrorism, arrests and murders in the south prevents the expression of the people's will."

He cited the assassination of the aged leader of the Farmers' Party, Lyuh Woon Heung, who had been one of the creators of that early short-lived "Korean People's Republic," whom the Americans had then installed as a left-wing balance in their right-wing government, and who had been killed by terrorists just two months earlier than this interview. Kim claimed that, in July, 1947, six weeks before our talk, when the Joint Commission of Americans and Russians was met in Seoul by a great popular demonstration, the police dispersed the crowd and made arrests in the meeting. Later, in August, reporters of left-wing papers were arrested as they left a press conference with the Soviet delegate to the Joint Conference in Seoul.

"Despite these difficulties created by the reactionary and pro-Japanese terrorists," said President Kim, "the Korean people



will eventually attain a united, democratic government. For this is the Korean people's will."

#### CHURCHMEN LEADING FIGURES

It will startle my readers to know that the next two highest figures in the North Korean government—after the Communist Kim Il Sung—are two Protestant preachers, both the product of American missionary schools! Vice-president Heong Ki Doo is a Methodist minister, while the Secretary of the Committee, Kang Lang Ook, is a Presbyterian minister. Both of them still preach on Sundays to large congregations, and attend to their government business during the week.

Secretary Kang remembers a little English from the days when he studied it twenty-three years ago under an American missionary named Moffett. It was hard at first to learn what denomination he belonged to, for he did not know the word "Presbyterian" in English, while the Korean name is not the same. Finally he said: "Calvin, Calvin," and the picture was clear. Kang taught for many years in a mission school and then completed the theological course, becoming a fully ordained pastor in 1940. He then experienced first hand the Japanese suppression of American missions, which grew as the war developed.

Today Pastor Kang preaches to a large Pyongyang church. He belongs to the Democratic Party. He is better known, however, as one of the creators of the "Union of Protestant Faith," organized to take part in "progressive politics." He believes that churches should take part in promoting democracy and progressive laws. He wanted to know whether "preachers do this in America," and was much pleased when I replied: "Some of them do."

"Under the Japanese," said Kang, "religion and politics had to be very separate. Some people think they should be separate still. But I think that all citizens and organizations in a democratic state should take part in promoting good laws."

Kang's "Union of Protestant Faith" had enrolled about one-third of all Protestants in North Korea at the time of my visit. It included a large proportion of the pastors. "Many of them take a leading role in local governments, being elected to the People's Committees," he said. Kang regretted, however, that

the Protestants on the whole are "more reactionary than the average run of the population." This, he thought, was because they are more wealthy than the average Korean.

There were many Protestant landlords, Kang told me. He was indignant at the way they "ran away to the south and told lies about religious persecution in the Soviet zone."

"It wasn't religion but land that worried them," he said. "Actually, religion is now free for the first time in forty years. The Japanese took our churches for offices and warehouses, but the Red Army gave them back in August, 1945. Now the churches belong to the believers whose number is growing."

If any dispute arises over church property, Kang told me, the Red Army protects the believers. During the elections, for instance, when enthusiastic citizens were posting pictures of candidates, some people in Kandon County wanted to put these on a church, which was the best placed building there. The believers objected to this, and the non-believers called them "undemocratic," unwilling to take part in the elections of their country. Both sides at last sought the advice of the local Red Army commandant. The latter supported the church members, stating that they alone could decide whether the placing of election banners "insulted their religion," and that if it did, no outsiders had the right to put anything on their church.

Kang smiled when I asked what position the Protestant clergy had taken towards the land reform. "Some of them spoke privately against it, because they had landlords in their congregation, but none of them dared oppose it very openly."

"Were they afraid of the government?" I asked.

Kang was shocked. "Oh, no, they were afraid of what the farmers in their congregations would say. The farmers would say that they went against religion. Does not the Bible tell us: 'Give to the poor' and 'He who does not work, shall not eat'? How then could a pastor openly oppose the land reform? He would be going against the Bible!"

Kang had suffered martyrdom for his convictions. A year ago a terrorist gang from South Korea threw a bomb into his home, killing his son and daughter and wounding both Kang and his wife. His face grew grim as he told me about this. He has kept right on fighting for "religion and progressive politics."



## 4. Land for the farmers

FOR THE FIRST TIME in many decades North Korea grows all its own food. It has to. It is shut off from its natural source of food in South Korea by the American-versus-Russian occupation and the 38th parallel.

North Korea is mountainous country where the Japanese developed mines, water-power and war industries, feeding them from the farm areas of South Korea and Manchuria. But Manchuria is today cut off by the Chinese civil war—while the Americans refuse rice from South Korea. So North Korea has to feed itself. And does!

It was not easy the first year. The harvest of 1946 was a poor one, so North Korea tried to get food from South Korea in payment for half a billion kilowatt hours of electric power they had supplied by that time from their great power plant on the Yalu River. (It has grown to more than a billion kilowatt hours now in 1948.) They also tried to get rice in payment for irrigation water which the north sent into the south to water some 60,000 acres. In both of these efforts they failed. So the North Koreans ate scantily on about one pound of grain per person per day, and many people—chiefly city folk without land who couldn't get on the ration list—went south in search of cheaper food.

By summer of 1947, the time of my visit, the land reform was well established, the cultivated area had been increased some 17.5 per cent over that of 1945 and the fields were better fertilized and better worked. So the big news in autumn of 1947 was that North Korea could feed itself properly on a harvest of two million metric tons, which was about a pound and a quarter of grain per person per day. The farmers incidentally had profited handsomely from the land reform and the high food prices. And hundreds of thousands of people were moving from South Korea into the north.

It began with the land reform. This threw the landlords out in twenty-three days and relieved three-fourths of the North

Korean farmers from a crushing burden of rent. This was followed by the "production drive," with a Farmers' Bank making cheap loans for seed and fertilizer. These two factors, together with the incentive of a pretty good price for food in the open market, stimulated the expansion of the farms. The cultivated area in the three northernmost provinces (whose boundaries have not changed and whose figures are therefore comparable with those of Japanese days) show an increase in the cultivated area from 3,015,500 acres in 1945 to 3,549,250 acres in 1947, a growth of 17.5 per cent in two years, which would be remarkable in any land. Even more striking was the increase in the farmers' standard of living, now that they no longer pay rent.

In the days of Japan's rule, by official figures of 1943, there were some three and a half million farming families in all Korea, owning some 8,750,000 acres of cultivated land. That's less than three acres per family. But they didn't have it equally. Some 62 per cent of the land was in the hands of landlords. Most of the soil tillers were share-croppers, and their rent was from 50 to 80 per cent of their crop.

To be precise, of all those three and a half million farming families, some 17.3 per cent owned all the land that they tilled. Some 52 per cent were fully sharecroppers, 21 per cent owned small bits of land but share-cropped additional land to keep going, while 4 per cent were farmhands.

Landlordism grew worse in the decades of Japanese rule. The Japanese took for themselves the land of Korean feudal lords; they put in irrigation systems and charged the farmers more than they could pay; then the Japanese-owned banks took over the lands on mortgages. Japan used Korea as her granary. Of a total rice harvest of 18 million "koku" in 1938, 11 million, or 60 per cent, went to Japan. The Japanese ate seven times as much rice per capita as the Koreans, condemning the latter to eat rice huskings and cheaper grains such as kaoliang.

Under the Japanese rule there were many farmers' uprisings. According to Japanese sources, 15,000 insurgents were killed and 10,000 jailed in uprisings between 1905 and 1907. Several hundred thousand Koreans took part in the Great Uprising on March 1, 1919, led by the religious pacifist sect, the Chendoguo. Of these 300,000 were arrested, beaten up or killed by the Japa-



nese police. Yet farmers' uprisings again took place in 1930 and 1933, and were again suppressed.

The Japanese overlords knew that they were sitting on a volcano in the Korean rural areas. So they quickly and ruthlessly jailed anyone who spoke a word of discontent or freedom. Almost everyone of influence in North Korea today has thus a prison past.

Lee Shun Kin, present minister of agriculture, came from a prosperous farming family which was able to give him an education in Tokyo University. Nonetheless he landed in jail twice, a total of seven years. His record is just an average one among Korean patriots.

#### PRESIDENT OF THE FARMERS' UNION

The real jail-bird hero of Korea's farmers is Kang Chin-kuan. He is president today of the Farmers' Union of North Korea, elected in tribute to his heroic past. From Kang's story one gains a picture of the Korean farmers' struggle through the years.

Kang and Minister Lee came to see me, to tell me the tale of Korea's farmers. The two men were an interesting contrast. Minister Lee had the quick brain of the educated man, the graduate in political economy, the statistician. Sixty-two year old Kang said little; he listened, considered and nodded. He has had little chance for education. But he knows and voices the needs and hopes of the farmers. His dark oval face expressed not only his own unusual endurance, but the suffering tenacity of generations of Korean share-croppers.

Old Kang was born in 1885 in a share-cropper family. He was a share-cropper all his life. He never went to school. At the age of fifteen he married. "My grandfather wanted to see my bride before he died, so they got me a wife," he said. "There was no ceremony. They just got her for nothing from a family that couldn't feed her." The short and bitter bridal of the poor!

Kang took part in the great 1919 uprising. When the uprising was crushed, he fled to Manchuria and continued to organize farmers. The soldiers of the warlord Chang Tso-lin caught him and gave him to the Japanese in 1921. He was in jail till 1940. "In a tiny cell," he said, "with a high-up grated window." Sometimes they took him under a guard to work.

"Could you ever talk to anyone?"

"Of course not," Kang laughed.

In 1940 they let him out as a man who was broken, no longer a danger to Japan. For Kang's limbs had grown atrophied in jail, and he could no longer walk nor even stand but only crawl. He was carried to his village home and dumped there. After a year he was walking a little. But even before he could walk he was doing illegal propaganda among the share-croppers again.

#### THE LAND REFORM

One of the first acts of the newly formed provisional government was the Land Reform Law. The rapid organization of "People's Committees," described in the previous section, went hand in hand with the organization of Farmers' Unions. Farmers formed some 60 per cent of the citizenry in North Korea, and they were also 60 per cent of the membership of the governing "People's Committees." The Provisional People's Committee for North Korea, under Kim Il Sung as president, took power on February 8, 1946, stating that its chief task was "to fulfill the farmers' demands."

At once the Farmers' Union of North Korea, which had grown by that time to 1,500,000 members, held a congress at Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, and demanded land reform on the basis of "land to the tiller." Two days later, on March 5, in the midst of a storm of letters and resolutions from farmers, the provisional government passed the Land Reform Law. It was announced on March 7 over the radio. Some 197,000 organizers were sent at once to the rural districts, where some 11,500 local committees were elected by landless farmers to apportion the newly acquired lands. The distribution was completed in twenty-three days, by April 1, 1946. The farmers, who demanded land in the first week in March, began their spring plowing in April on their newly acquired lands.

Probably no land reform in all history has been accomplished so swiftly and with so little turmoil.

The Land Reform Law was sweeping. It confiscated all Japanese lands, whether public or private, all landlords' lands, if the landlord owned more than twelve acres, or if, owning less, he systematically rented the land and did not work it himself,



all lands of churches and monasteries that exceeded twelve acres. The lands were given to village committees to distribute on the basis of the number of people in each farm family, and also with reference to the number of adult workers. Landlords also might get land to till but not more than twelve acres, and this must be in another county where they would have no traditional influence. Of the 70,000 landlords in North Korea, 3,500 took advantage of this permission.

Some 724,522 farming families got land, 72 per cent of all the farmers of North Korea. Of these 442,975, or more than half, had been landless share-croppers or farmhands, while the rest had possessed small bits of land supplemented by share-cropping. Of the 4,950,000 arable acres in North Korea, some 2,625,000—more than half—was thus distributed.

Before the land reform the average holding of poor farmers was half an acre; after the reform it was five acres. Before the land reform over half a million farming families could not feed themselves till the next harvest, but were forced to borrow food at usurious rates. After the reform, every farming family could feed itself. Even though 1946 was a bad crop year because of excessive rains, the farmers had much more food than formerly. They now gave 25 per cent of their crop to the government in tax, instead of the former 50 to 80 per cent to the landlords in rent.

#### UNREST IN THE SOUTH

Nothing could keep the news of this land reform from seeping into the rural areas of South Korea, where, under the American occupation, the landlords still held the lands. This was why the general strike in South Korea in autumn of 1946, which began with the city workers, spread swiftly into the rural areas, until there were farmers and workers demonstrations and uprisings in eighty centers, put down bloodily by the South Korean police, with the help of the American military.

An air of success spread over North Korea in autumn of 1947. It was especially noticeable on the farms. Almost every village had extended its sown area and had worked its fields better—with government loans for seed and fertilizer. The weather had been favorable and there was a good crop.

My trip from coast to coast across the peninsula showed every inch of arable land well sown. Fields came so close to the railroad that a casual glance through the window gave the illusion that we were riding over the crops. Rice fields were thick with sharp blades of that dark blue-green color that shows well-fertilized soil. One heard that the fields in South Korea had gone yellow for want of the fertilizer, which comes from a chemical works in North Korea. This fertilizer plant once supplied South Korea and sent fertilizer to Manchuria and Japan as well. At any time in the past two years North Korea would gladly have exchanged fertilizer with the South for food. Something always got in the way. Perhaps the Americans needed the surplus South Korean rice for Japan, or perhaps there wasn't any surplus. North Koreans wouldn't know. Anyway, unable to trade it to the South, they put all the fertilizer on their own fields, with good result.

#### A VILLAGE IN THE EAST

Let us take two sample villages that I visited, one near the east coast and one near the west coast, not far from Pyongyang.

Driving out from Wonsen on the east coast, with a Korean farm inspector, I came to the village Shinchunghi, a cluster of thatched-room clay houses buried under green vegetation. We took off our shoes to enter the village committee-room, for the floor was of soft mats. We talked here with Pak I Ho, village chairman, a man in his early thirties who was "head of a family of twelve." These were not all his own children, but included his parents, brothers and brothers' wives, as Oriental families do.

This village, said Pak, had 150 households, with 278 acres of "wet field" suitable for rice and 310 acres of "dry field" suitable for wheat. It thus averaged about four acres per family. Before the land reform, only twelve families could live from their own land. Fifteen were part-tenants, owning in all fifty acres, but renting more. Thirteen were landless laborers. One hundred and ten families were share-croppers. All of the landlords lived outside the village, some in the county town, some in the provincial capital.

"There had been many small revolts by tenants against landlords," said Pak. "Usually these took the form of a demand by the



around, nodded as he mentioned each of the new things in turn. There was the land reform, and the teaching of children and illiterates—"Formerly only the rich studied but now we have forty children and sixty grown-ups going to school." There was the electricity and the radios. And taxes were of many kinds formerly but now are only three: for the government, for the province and for the school. Then there are the secret elections and the right of everyone to be elected. "We have a People's Committee of five elected by the villagers, instead of the former 'gugen' appointed from the county. Then there is this Women's Union that is getting equality."

"Of all these new things which is the most important?" I asked, while a dozen villagers clustered close to hear.

The chairman considered for a moment and then answered with decision: "The land reform—and the free speech."

Such are the changes in land ownership and in daily living that have made the farmers of North Korea a solid bulwark of the new regime.

## 5. *With the factory workers*

WHEN STRIKES OCCUR in the American zone of South Korea, one of the workers demands is usually for a Labor Code like that in the Soviet zone of North Korea. This naturally annoys the American Military Government, which sees in such strikes the work of the Communists. The demand, however, raises the question: What are the labor conditions in North Korea?

All the industrial workers I met in North Korea like to brag that they were the first workers in the Far East to enjoy a "fully modern labor law, with the eight-hour day, collective bargaining and social insurance." Their claim is not strictly correct for the Liberated Areas of China and Manchuria just over their border have an equally good labor code. Nonetheless the North

Koreans have the right to feel proud of their achievements. In one respect they can claim to surpass their Chinese brothers—their well-equipped social insurance. The Japanese had more health resorts and summer villas in Korea than in China and the present Department of Labor has taken them over. The North Koreans have also a larger amount of publicly owned industry than the nearby Chinese, for Korea was highly industrialized by the Japanese.

Minister of Labor Oh Ki-sup, with whom I went on a four-day trip to health resorts, is one of those typical patriots who spent the greater part of his adult life in Japanese jails. At the age of sixteen he joined the underground movement for Korean independence. He has spent thirteen years and eight months in jail. In telling about his imprisonment he mentioned casually what seemed to me its most amazing feature. He had organized four revolutionary study circles inside four different jails and one outside at a time when he was in "solitary" confinement!

Minister Oh's account of how he did it throws sharp light on the inner weakness of imperialism. The facade of Japanese control seemed imposing and strong, but there were weak places in it ready to crack. The night watchmen and night warders in the jails were Koreans, because the Japanese conquerors disdained these least desirable jobs. Prisoner Oh played upon the patriotism and also upon the cupidity of these jailers. He would find some watchman who would take messages to his friends outside, either through anti-Japanese patriotism or for the money the outside friends would give. On this slender basis Oh built his study groups, one in each of the jails to which he was transferred. In all of this time Prisoner Oh was never permitted legally to have a pencil or a scrap of paper. He saved bits of toilet paper—of which he was allowed two pieces a day—and he had a tiny sliver of hidden lead that served as a pencil. Through such difficulties the revolutionary movement of the Korean patriots grew. Prisoner Oh managed to organize illegally right up to the day of national liberation.

As soon as the Red Army arrived and liberated Oh and the other political prisoners, the liberated men hastened to the factories and workshops where they were known—others of course were hurrying to the farms—and called workers' meetings. These



workers' meetings at once took part in setting up city and provincial government; they also organized trade unions, first by factories, then by cities, counties and provinces.

There was a fury of organization throughout Korea in those first months of Japan's defeat. By November, 1945, the All-Korean Federation of Trade Unions was organized, covering both north and south. Four months later the Korean trade unions reluctantly divided themselves into a North Korean Labor Federation and a South Korean Labor Federation. "It was the American policy in South Korea that compelled this division," said Minister Oh.

"In the first months after Japan's defeat all Korea felt united," he continued. "The 38th parallel did not seem to be a barrier to the Koreans but only a temporary convenience of the occupying powers, until they should impose their peace terms on Japan. We Koreans organized our trade unions, farmers' unions, local governments on an all-Korean basis. The first headquarters of the All-Korean Federation of Trade Unions was at Seoul, in South Korea, while North Korea had only a branch office. Then the American Army began to suppress trade unions in the south. The chairman of the All-Korean Federation was imprisoned in Seoul. Meanwhile in the north the trade unions grew rapidly, operated openly, had collective agreements with all factories, took part in the production plans for industry and put up labor candidates for government. In the south they had to work on a semi-legal or a completely underground basis. These different conditions forced a separation of the trade unions into northern and southern federations."

There were some 430,000 workers in North Korea, of whom 380,000 were members of trade unions, according to Minister Oh. This number does not include seasonal workers such as fishermen, lumbermen and building workers who farm in summer and take odd jobs in winter. Nor does it include farm laborers, because the land reform turned these into farmers owning their own land. The largest trade union is that of miners with 52,000 members, then transport workers and chemical workers with some 45,000 each. About one hundred thousand belong to unions of white collar workers including office workers, teachers, sanitary workers and so on.

"What do you do about unemployment?" I asked the minister.

"There isn't any," he replied. "There is, on the contrary, a great shortage of workers because we have so much reconstruction to do and we are expanding our industry. We need thirteen million more work-days than we can count on for just the reconstruction of roads and bridges. This means that in this reconstruction alone we could absorb 45,000 more workers."

Many workers, said Minister Oh, were migrating from the American zone of South Korea into North Korea because of the unemployment in the South and the better chance of jobs in the North.

#### NATIONALIZATION OF INDUSTRY

The labor conditions of North Korea are built on publicly owned industries. The nationalization of industry was a relatively simple problem for 90 per cent of all big industry belonged to Japanese concerns. The Japanese made of Korea a military base against China and the USSR. They constructed strategic railways and highways, a powerful war industry and big power plants that supplied not only Korea but part of Manchuria with electric power.

All of this Japanese-owned industry was seized by the Russian victors and then turned over to the Koreans. By a decree passed August 10, 1946, by the North Korean provisional government, all industry "belonging to Japanese and traitors" was nationalized. There was nobody to oppose this decree for the Japanese and their supporters had either gone back to Japan or fled south to the American zone. The Korean people of the north thus came into possession of the banks, railways, communications and 90 per cent of all big industry more simply and with much less turmoil than usually attends such nationalization.

Two serious problems at once confronted the industries. First, all industry had been hitched to Japan. All Korean plants produced parts and semi-finished products that were sent to Japan for completion. There was not a single finished product in all Korean industry. Now that Korea had become independent, her industry must be remodelled and reconverted from a war industry serving Japan to a peace-time industry serving the needs of the Koreans.



The second problem was posed by the fact that the Japanese destroyed everything they could before they surrendered. The Korean workers' underground does not seem to have been strong enough to prevent this. The Japanese wrecked 80 per cent of all locomotives on the railways, and damaged the rolling stock, repair shops and even the right of way. Some 64 mines were flooded and 178 were otherwise made unusable. All blast furnaces and coke batteries and most of the open-hearth furnaces in the country's iron and steel works were destroyed by the simple process of letting them cook with the charge inside.

I visited, for instance, the largest iron and steel works in the country, the Kensiko Steel Works, located a short distance north of Pyongyang. Under the Japanese it had three big blast furnaces, three open-hearth furnaces and employed seven or eight thousand workers making pig iron, steel, sheet steel, rolled steel and coke for the Mitsubishi concern of Japan. At the time of my visit there were some 6,800 workers but most of these were still engaged in rebuilding the works. All the three blast furnaces and the three open-hearth furnaces, they told me, had been spoiled by allowing the molten metal in them to cool and harden. When I asked why the Korean workers had not prevented this, they replied that the Koreans had held unskilled jobs and had not been in charge of the technical processes.

#### HUGE CHEMICAL PLANT SAVED

The big chemical works in Jeungnam was, by contrast, saved by its workers. This plant was the largest industrial enterprise in Korea, employing 20,000 workers. Among other things, they made one of the constituent elements of the atom-bomb on which the Japanese were experimenting. When the Japanese surrendered, they planned to blow this factory up with its own explosives. There was, however, an alert underground Korean trade union in the chemical works. The workers discovered the plot, and expelled the Japanese from the works in an armed struggle lasting four hours. They then located the explosives, which had been set with time fuses, and threw them into the sea.

"If those had gone off, they would have wiped out not only the entire works, but a city of 150,000 people," I was told by a group of those chemical workers whom I met in a seaside health resort.

They added that, as soon as the Japanese were expelled, the trade union came out into the open, set up guards over the factory and took an active part in electing the local government.

The new labor code was passed June 24, 1946, some six weeks before the industries were nationalized. It provided the eight-hour-day—seven in hazardous work—and two weeks vacation with pay for ordinary workers, but one month vacation for youths and those in hazardous trades. (Under the Japanese the work day sometimes ran to fifteen or sixteen hours and there were no paid vacations.) The new law forbade child labor, gave women equal pay for equal work and introduced a safety code.

One of the most appreciated innovations was the Social Insurance. It began to function in January of 1947. Nearly 200,000 workers were given free medical treatment in the first six months of the year. Many houses and summer villas formerly owned by the Japanese were turned over to the Ministry of Labor and made available to the Korean workers through the Social Insurance. By summer of 1947, the time of my visit, the Social Insurance possessed 85 summer villas with 1,400 beds, and expected to give free vacations to 25,000 workers during the season.

Many workers' families also received new houses through the trade unions, for the homes of the former Japanese owners, managers, and technical staff were turned over to the workers and distributed through the unions to those who made special records or had special needs.

#### AT A HEALTH RESORT

I spent four days in a health resort of the Social Insurance. I went swimming three times in one day on one of the finest beaches in the world. It was on the east coast and the water was warm with gently sloping sands and the charm of a tropical beach without the dangerous sea animals and plants of the tropics. Two years earlier this beach with its villas belonged to the ruling Japanese; Koreans were not permitted to use it. Today the villas belong to the Ministry of Labor and are used through the Social Insurance for the vacations of industrial workers.

Five shy but self-possessed women came to my room when I asked for an interview with some women workers. There were



two weavers from the Hamheung Textile Mills, a young spinner from the silk filature mill of Pyongyang, and a fifteen-year-old orphan—she looked barely twelve—who lived in a factory dormitory, worked six hours daily in the factory and went for two hours to the factory school.

One woman of thirty-six sat demurely looking at the ocean in a figured white silk gown. I postponed interviewing her, for she looked such a typical housewife that I thought her the wife of some official or engineer. When I asked her what she did, I got a shock.

"I am a gold miner," she said, "working three hundred feet underground. I am a skilled worker; I operate a drill."

"Isn't that heavy work?" I asked.

She smiled a bit apologetically and replied that it was. "But not as heavy as the work I used to do. Under the Japanese I loaded ore and pushed the cars, working thirteen hours or more a day. Now, as pneumatic drill operator, I work only seven hours and get very good pay."

Lee Mai Hwa was her name. She had worked many years in the mines. But she had only been a driller for one year; under the Japanese rule women were not allowed to learn the higher skills. She was proud of her job.

"How did you get this work?" I asked. "Did you replace a man?"

"I got my job because we are expanding production and because I studied the work. Under the Japanese we had only 1,000 workers in our mine, but now we have 2,500." Among the 2,500 workers, Lee said, there were 206 women but only two of these were drillers. Lee Mai Hwa was the first.

Lee was proud of her wages. They are twice what her husband gets. He works for the same mine but on the surface. He sharpens drills. He makes at most 2,000 yen a month.

"But I made 4,000 last month," bragged Lee. "For women now get equal pay for equal work and my work is very skilled . . . I also set many records. Formerly a driller drilled one car of ore a day, but once, for a record, I drilled twenty cars in one day! It takes four and even six loaders to load all the ore I drill."

"You must be the head of your family," I commented.

"That's what my husband says," replied the complacent Lee.

"Is he jealous?"

"No, he's proud," she assured me.

I inquired into her standard of living. Just what can she buy with the 6,000 yen that she and her husband make?

Under the Japanese, said Lee, the food was very bad. "Now I get rationed food, 750 grams of rice a day for my ration and the same amount for my husband. We are both first category workers." This rationed rice costs only five yen a kilo. So the basic rice food costs only 230 yen a month from the family wage of 6,000 yen.

"We have a good house now," Lee added. "It formerly belonged to a Japanese official. It has a warmed floor." (This is the Korean way of heating good houses.) "We have two big rooms and four closet-rooms and a little hall."

"Did you ever have a nice silk dress like that under the Japanese?" I asked.

"Oh, never," smiled Lee with a touch of amusement, stroking her white, silk gown.

Lee also told me about the general elections held in her town where the candidate was "a worker from our mine." But this I have given in the chapter on government and elections.

#### LABOR HEROES

The modern labor law and the nationalization of industry aroused loyalty and energetic devotion among North Korea's workers. When they understood that the industries were now the property of the Korean people, they began to work like mad to repair them.

At the Seisein Spinning Mills the workers contributed nearly 9,000 hours of voluntary labor to repair the mill. The Tonchen wharves were rebuilt nearly 200 days before the date called for in the plan.

At the Kensiko Steel Works they introduced to me proudly two "labor heroes," Chi Sam Zon and Lee Sam Zon, who had remained in the shop for thirteen days so that the rolling mill would not stop.

"We Koreans have very few technicians or skilled workers," they explained, "so we had to stay on the job until we could train in substitutes."



"What is the biggest change in your lives made by the liberation?" I asked a group of workers in the Kensiko Works. They discussed it among themselves and combined on these three answers.

"First: Formerly we worked thirteen hours a day and had no time to think; now we work eight hours and we know all kinds of things about the world.

"Second: Formerly we ate no rice but only husks of soya beans; now we have a good rice ration of a pound and a half daily and we live in better houses too.

"Third: Formerly we had no voice in anything; now we have a voice in management through our trade union and a voice in government through our votes."

These are the changes that have made the industrial workers of North Korea a solid bulwark of the new regime.

## 6. *And now?*

AND NOW that I have returned to America, and look back at North Korea from the events of today, as shown in the American press, I think that my trip to that country throws light on some of the recent reports.

In May of 1948, Korea broke once more into headlines because the Northern Koreans had shut off the electric power from South Korea. According to the American press, it was all the fault of the Russians. The Russians had shut it off. General Hodge, commander of the American armed forces, demanded that the Russians turn the electricity on again. When the Russians referred him to the Koreans, he appealed to Moscow. One more battle in the cold war.

Yet the facts were really very simple. General Hodge and the American press chose to shut their eyes to them, but the facts were there. The great power stations on the Yalu River were built by the Japanese. The Russians seized them as war booty and

promptly gave them "to the Korean people" in the summer of 1946. The provisional government of North Korea—known as the "People's Committee of North Korea"—operated them, sending power to North and South Korea and far into Manchuria, to Mukden, Port Arthur and Dairen.

Two years went by. South Korea didn't pay for this electric power. Mukden paid its bills, Dairen paid its bills, North Korea paid its bills, but the American occupation in South Korea did not pay. There were two reasons for this: a technical reason and a top-flight political reason. But even the technical reason was flavored with politics.

The technical reason was that the North Koreans demanded payment in electric equipment from the United States. General Hodge offered to pay in dollars, but how could the North Koreans use those dollars when the American Congress was boycotting Soviet trade? North Korea was perhaps the one spot on earth that scorned dollars. "Give us electric equipment to repair the power plants," they said.

The Americans offered nylon stockings and tobacco and Hollywood movies. But the North Koreans stood pat on getting electric equipment. The reason was plain: so much electric development was going on in all the farming villages of North Korea that they simply couldn't spare power for South Korea unless they got more equipment. It was as simple as that.

The top-flight political reason was that General Hodge insisted on treating the Russians as the owners of the power plant, while the Russians insisted that it had belonged to "the Korean people" for a couple of years. General Hodge does not want to admit that the North Koreans have a legal existence, even as power-plant owners. It is American policy to consider that only the South Koreans have a government administration, while the North Koreans are "Russian puppets." Hodge is like an industrialist who sticks on the point of recognizing the union, but the union also stays pat till it gets recognized.

At the time of my visit to North Korea, August, 1947, South Korea had run up a bill of some 700 million kilowatt hours. (It is more than one billion today.) Any ordinary capitalist electric company would long since have cut such a customer off. I asked the North Koreans why they didn't. The answer is revealing:



"You see, the Russians gave the power plant to 'the Korean people.' That means also the Koreans of the south. We northerners have the management of it, but the power belongs to all Korea and not to us alone. We do not wish to injure our fellow Koreans. We only want them to pay their bill. We want them to pay with equipment, so that we can supply more customers. We are giving them time because their situation is complicated. But some day we'll have to shut off the power, if they don't pay."

In April, 1948, after South Korea had enjoyed two and a half years of electric power without paying, the North Korean radio announced that the power would be shut off unless some responsible people from South Korea came north to discuss the bill. General Hodge refused to recognize this "irresponsible radio," as representing the owners of the power plant. He continued to curse the Russians. So the North Koreans shut off the power and waited for their pay.

That is the simple tale of the power plant, which the American press views as a new Moscow intrigue.

#### AN INCIDENT EXPOSED

I also note in the press the continuous friction over a certain irrigation dam. On May 26, an American soldier was wounded near the border of the Soviet zone. The headline read: "Russ Wound American." The news story made no mention of any Russians present, but said the American was wounded by "shots from the Russian zone." A careful further reading disclosed that the American had been in a jeep riding along the frontier, near a dam of an irrigation project that straddles the two zones.

Now I think I can throw some light on that incident. When I was in North Korea, they told me that there was an irrigation project in North Korea which supplied water to irrigate 60,000 acres in South Korea.

"We've tried for two years to get paid for that water, but we haven't succeeded yet," they said. They did not blame the South Korean farmers; they blamed the "friction between the zones."

Months later I read a news item to the effect that "the Russians" had turned off the water for a place in South Korea, and that angry South Korean farmers were trying to smash the North Korean dam, which was guarded closely by North Korean con-

stabulary. Since every village in North Korea is today increasing its cultivated fields, and especially its irrigation, it is clear that the water which once went south—and wasn't paid for—is now being used in the north, while the southern farmers angrily try to get it back.

If an armed American in a jeep drives up to an irrigation dam over which such a local fight is going on, he is looking for trouble. There is no proof that any Russian was within a hundred miles when the man was wounded. Some over-suspicious Korean was protecting his dam. Or was he so over-suspicious after all?

#### WHO RAN FROM WHERE

"But if everything is so good in the Soviet zone, why do they run away to the American zone?" is a question asked me, both at lectures and by the press.

The answer is, as far as I can give it, that there has been big migration both ways. The first migration went south. It consisted of pro-Japanese officials, former police, former landlords, holders of shares in Japanese companies and also, I imagine, of city people without ration books who found the cost of food very high that first year in the north and thought it would be cheaper in the south. No farmers seem to have fled south, and no industrial workers.

The Americans in South Korea complained that their difficulties were increased by the necessity of "feeding these refugees from the north." But South Korea always fed those people, for South Korea always produced food for the north. When the Americans refused to let the food come north, the people had to go south for it.

By the second year, 1947, the year of my visit, the situation had changed. Farms had expanded in North Korea, there was a good crop, and a half million people moved north. They were counted at the quarantine stations at over 1,500 per day.

The people coming north were workers looking for jobs, and farmers looking for land. I met them in factories and on farms.

The north was the gainer by this exchange of populations. The north lost ex-policemen, ex-officials and city folk living on rents and profits; it gained workers and farming people, eager to build and develop the land.



I talked to two of these workers. "Why did you come north?" I asked.

They told me they fled the American zone because there was so much disorder and so much unemployment there.

"The tireworks did not open," said one, "because they can bring tires cheaper from America."

"The textile mill closed down," said another, "because the Korean who bought it found more profit in selling the raw material and machines."

The picture was clear. South Korea, under American control, was becoming a market for American goods and a source of raw material for America. The American Army had taken over Japanese lands and become the greatest landlord in the south. American capital was taking over Japanese factories and tying them into American needs. So there was unemployment in the south, and unrest, and strikes, and revolts.

In the north the Russians had taken nothing for themselves. They had given the Japanese industries to the Korean people as a public possession. And the lands of the Japanese landlords and the Korean landlords had become the property of the men who tilled them.

So there is food in the north and increasing production of factory goods, and repairing of the ravages of war.

#### UNITY OR CIVIL WAR?

Will the north and south come together? Or will there be civil war?

The 38th parallel, at first used only as a military convenience, has become a barrier dividing two worlds. It has polarized the Korean people; the reactionaries fled south, while the left-wing workers and farmers migrate north. Many observers think the divisions are growing and are pregnant with civil war. In the year since I left North Korea there has developed a "People's Army" while South Korea has also developed armed forces, with former soldiers of the Japanese Army as a base.

There are possibilities of dangerous friction. But I think people who expect civil war here fail to reckon with the passion for unity and for independence that the great majority of Koreans feel.

It was this passion that led Kim Koo, a right-wing terrorist but none the less a Korean patriot—and Kimm Kiu-sic, a former employee of an American firm and an American appointee in government, but none the less a Korean patriot also, to go north to the Unity Congress, leaving the plums of government and graft in South Korea to the Syngman Rhee machine. I think the Unity Government of the north will outlast Syngman Rhee's machine, with all its American backing.

### **Soviet statement on evacuation of troops**

*The statement of the Foreign Ministry of the USSR on the evacuation of Soviet troops from Korea, as published on September 19, 1948, by the Moscow press:*

ON SEPTEMBER 10 the Supreme National Assembly of Korea issued an appeal to the Governments of the USSR and the USA requesting the simultaneous withdrawal of Soviet and American troops from Korea. It declared that the formation of the Supreme National Assembly of Korea, and the creation by that Assembly of a united Korean Government composed of representatives of various political trends of North and South Korea, representing the overwhelming majority of the population of North and South Korea, was a guarantee that during and after the withdrawal of foreign troops complete law and order would be preserved all over Korea.

It is known that in the autumn of 1945, after routing the Japanese Kwantung Army, the Soviet troops

liberated Korea from the Japanese occupationists, and in conformity with the agreement between the Allies, remained in Korea north of the 38th parallel, while American troops remained on Korean territory south of the 38th parallel.

Remaining in North Korean territory, the Soviet troops gave the North Korean population ample opportunity to create organs of democratic administration, and constantly rendered friendly assistance to Korea's national revival. The number of Soviet troops in North Korea was steadily reduced.

In September, 1947, the Soviet Government proposed to the United States Government that there should be simultaneous withdrawal of Soviet and American troops from Korea. It has subsequently confirmed on many occasions its readiness to withdraw Soviet troops from North Korea at once if the United States Government simultaneously withdrew the American troops from South Korea. The United States



Government has not so far agreed to these proposals.

The request put forward by the Korean Supreme National Assembly for the simultaneous withdrawal of Soviet and American troops from Korea was referred by the Soviet Government to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, which examined the request of the Korean Supreme National Assembly and decided that it was time to evacuate the Soviet troops from North Korea. The Presidium expressed the hope that the United States Government will agree to withdrawal of the United States troops from South Korea, in accordance with the desire of the Supreme National Assembly of Korea.

In conformity with the decision passed by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the Council of Ministers of the USSR has decreed:

1. To withdraw to the territory of the USSR the Soviet troops remaining on the territory of North Korea.

2. To instruct the Ministry of the Armed Forces of the USSR to begin the evacuation of Soviet troops from North Korea not later than in the second half of October, 1948, and to complete it by January 1, 1949.

*On December 30, the Moscow radio announced that withdrawal of Soviet troops from North Korea had been completed by December 25.*



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